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# NAVY MED NAVIGATOR

## Rescue at Sea

### Comfort saves stranded Bermuda fisherman

#### Headlining in U.S. news...

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld signed a deployment order Friday to send an additional 35,000 U.S. troops to the Persian Gulf region. It is the largest deployment order since the U.S. began a buildup of forces last month in case of a war against Iraq. The orders affect about 7,000 Marines from Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, who had already been ordered aboard three ships -- the USS Saipan, the USS Ponce and the USS Gunston Hall -- which left from their home port of Norfolk, Virginia, on Friday.

Police divers hunting for a missing pregnant woman were prevented by weather and fatigue Friday from bringing to the surface a possible body from the marina where her husband said he went fishing on the day she disappeared. Search crews using sonar equipment detected the large object at Berkeley Marina, about 85 miles from Laci Peterson's home, late on Thursday but were unable to retrieve it while battling bad weather and strong currents.

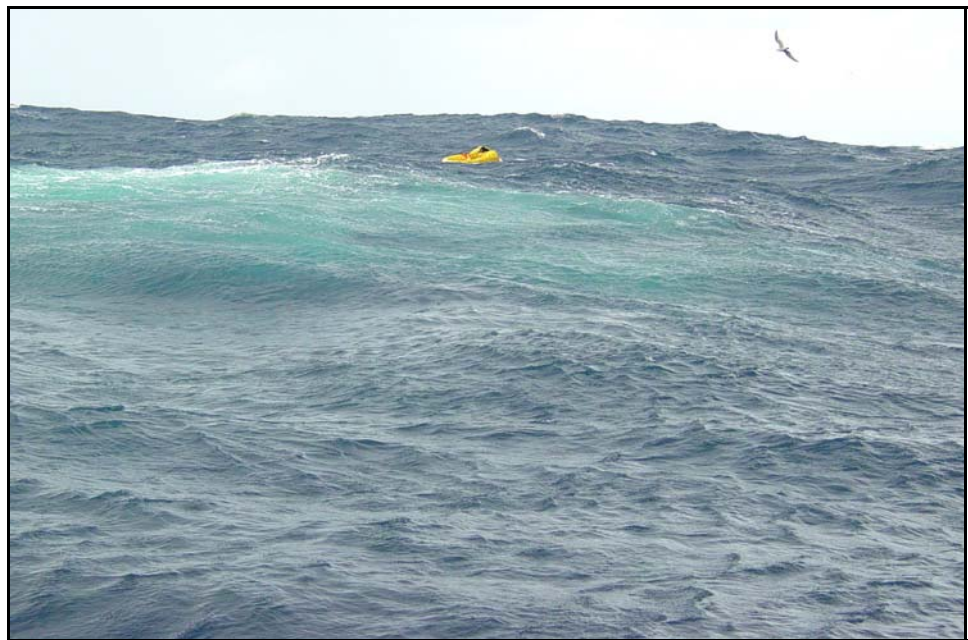
#### In military news...

Department of the Navy officials announced this week that they will cease military training on the Vieques Inner Range by May 1. Training alternatives have been identified that will collectively provide equivalent or superior training to the options provided by the island of Vieques. The Navy and Marine Corps will conduct future military training of east coast units at existing continental U.S. ranges and facilities. Additionally, the Navy and Marines intend to maximize the use of enhanced training technologies.

Reporting seniors and other Navy personnel now have an online means of obtaining fitness reports (FITREPS) and evaluation information. This new capability can be accessed from the Bureau of Naval Personnel (BUPERS) Online home page. Simply select the "FITREP/EVAL REPORTS" icon and follow the instructions. Three separate reports are available, including Performance Evaluation Continuity report, Reporting Senior's Performance Evaluation Submission report and the Reporting Senior's Cumulative Average report.

A former Navy hospital corpsman is now an Ensign and has been selected to participate in the Navy Nuclear Propulsion Program, Nuclear Aircraft Carrier Option.

"There are 170 students selected each year, and Ensign Sheree T. Brown is the third African-American female accepted in its existence," said Capt. Tom Daniels, Florida A&M University Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC) commanding officer. While going through NROTC, Brown attained the rank of unit battalion commanding officer, the highest rank for a student.



Story and photos by JO2 J. Ellen Maurer

**Aboard USNS COMFORT (T-AH 20) –** Navy Sailors and civilian mariners worked together to rescue a Bermuda fisherman Wednesday after his vessel sank due to rough seas.

Robert Lambe, 35, had departed on an expedition Monday to locate and retrieve an abandoned yacht. He and two other crewmembers aboard his fishing vessel, New Nuts, were not able to find this missing yacht and had decided to return to Bermuda when they encountered rough weather.

Then, as Lambe recalls, at about 6:30 p.m., a huge wave struck his boat and rolled it over. Lambe was able to swim out, but his friends were not.

Clinging to the outside of his upside down boat, he shouted and banged on the hull, trying to contact his crewmembers. There was no response and within minutes, his boat began to sink. Lambe found

a piece of debris — a 6-foot by 8-foot piece of wood — and grabbed it. Then, he waited.

Lambe spent the rest of Tuesday night hoping to be discovered by Coast Guard planes flying above, who'd been tipped of the distressed boat's location by an automatic signal that the boat sent when it capsized. He knew, however, that it would be difficult for anyone to spot him in the water because they were looking for an entire boat, not a man in the water.

Lambe says that waves must have knocked him off the wood almost 20 times throughout the night. Each time, he came back out of the water and found the wood again, knowing he needed it to stay alive.

He cannot recall exactly how many times the plane passed over him. He says there even came a point where one plane that passed several times, turned and left. He could tell its direction based on his experience at sea and directional skills, and knew the plane was probably headed-

home.

That was his low point, says Lambe. He says he said a few prayers, and then contemplated whether he should keep holding on to the wood, or just let go and get it over with. He decided to hold on.

Shortly after, another plane approached Lambe's location. The plane made a few sweeps of the area, but still had not spotted the stranded fisherman. Knowing he needed to get their attention, Lambe thought to flip the piece of debris over, hoping the other shade of blue would contrast better with the water and catch the rescuer's eye. As the plane passed over, Lambe took off his jacket and began waving it in the air with all the energy he could muster. This time, someone saw him.

By the time Lambe was thrown a life raft, he estimates that he was in the water for nearly 19 hours.

However, it would only be one more hour before crewmembers aboard Comfort would have him out of the water and into medical care.

Aboard Comfort, the rescue was both a complicated and delicate process of seamanship and teamwork. Coast Guard had requested the ship attempt the rescue, as they were the closest to the stranded man. Those aboard Comfort knew not the man's identity, nationality or even why he was in the water, but they knew he needed help.

A team of civilian mariners, led by the ship's Chief Mate, Dean Bradford, opened a boat launch hatch close to the waterline near the middle of the ship and began making preparations to get to the man. Qualified Navy rescue swimmer, MSCS John Slattery, the leading Mess Specialist aboard Comfort, suited up into his swim gear and prepared to go into the water to get the fisherman, if necessary. Plans, Operations and Medical Intelligence Officer, Lt. Dean Teague, who is also a Navy diver, assisted him.

As it turns out, none of the Comfort crewmembers needed to get wet,



*(Left) Lambe grabs onto a ladder.*

except for the waves coming into the hatch as the ship maneuvered to get closer to the raft. When they were close enough, a civilian mariner was able to throw a grappling hook and catch a rope attached to the life raft. Slowly, so they didn't snap the rope, they pulled the raft to the ship. With the help of Slattery and Teague, Lambe was able to use a ladder to climb aboard the ship.

Immediately, Lambe starting talking to the crewmembers, saying he was all right. Cmdr. James Pellack, Executive Officer of the Medical Treatment Facility aboard Comfort and Teague, helped Lambe up to the Casualty Receiving area, where a medical crew was standing by to assess his condition.

Since Lambe spoke English, it was easier for the crew to ask basic medical questions about his condition. Only after he was stable did anyone hear the amazing story of his ordeal at sea.

Lambe is now in good condition aboard Comfort. He was being treated for his conditions resulting from being in the water for so long,

but his physician, Cmdr. Terrence Dwyer says he is expected to make a full recovery.

Lambe says he is extremely grateful for all the assistance he has received from his new shipmates. A little embarrassed by all the national attention his story is receiving, Lambe even joked with reporters that he'd be willing to find a permanent job aboard Comfort. He says he'd like to be a Navy SEAL and jump out of helicopters into the water. Apparently, the whole experience has not scared him away from the sea.

Says Lambe, "Hey, if you hang around the water long enough, you're bound to get your feet wet."



*(Right) Cmdr. Brian Lewis covers Lambe as Cmdr. Terrence Dwyer, Lt. Cmdr. Vicki Edgar and HM3 Richard Pascal start monitoring his vital signs.*



*(Right) A happy and healthy Lambe sits on the bed in CasRec where he was first treated.*

### ***Want to see more?***

These photos and many more can be found on the Shared drive in the folder "a" and you can also find the story and photos on the Navy News-Stand at [www.news.navy.mil](http://www.news.navy.mil).